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# UNITY

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## Editorial Comments

nitarian - Universalist Merger? The proposed plan to consolidate the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America is now before these two bodies. The initial action upon it will take place in Syracuse, New York, at the end of October. If this report is accepted as blindly as reports of previous Commissions, the leadership of organized liberal religion will be set back at least a generation and the advance of the liberal movement as exemplified in the growth of Unitarianism will come to a grinding halt.

The Joint Merger Commission has recommended a monolithic organizational structure which creates, at its worst, a monarchy with the *de facto* power in the hands of the President or, at best, an oligarchy dominated by the four principal officers of the Association. It would strip the regions and subregions of their autonomy and the right of free, voluntary association. It would seal and guarantee the power of the administration by eliminating any independent fund raising and by placing complete financial control in the Association. No more nearly totalitarian structure could be

foisted on a so-called free people.

There is a generous use of such terms as autonomy, democracy, and freedom but these in no way affect the basic organizational pattern. They are a sop provided to prevent a lethargic majority from bestirring themselves to analyze and evaluate the real essence of the power structure. This reactionary organizational structure would do much to mitigate the liberalism professed in the statement of purposes. The Commission has again demonstrated that the major results of religious mergers are conservative and deadening rather than progressive and creative.

Freedom has been the genius of Unitarianism. The voluntary, free association of people, churches, and fellowships into regional and subregional organizations and their cooperative relationships have been the basis of the vitality and growth of the Unitarian movement during the past twenty years. To trade these principles and practices for the mess of potage of apparent organizational unity and efficiency is to betray our heritage and to abdicate our basic responsibility of demonstrating the effectiveness of democratic freedom in organizational proce-

dures as well as in intellectual pursuits.

There could be improvements in our present practices but the way to do it is to improve them not to liquidate them. The plan of the Commission for the consolidation of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America is a retreat from democracy. Further, the Commission has exceeded its authority in prescribing in areas other than for the two continental bodies.

This plan of merger or consolidation should be defeated. There is too much wrong with it to rewrite it at Syracuse. Hastily prepared amendments to rectify specific issues are not adequate for dealing with the basic policies underlying and determining the organizational structure.

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We call your attention to the comments by Dale DeWitt, J. Ray Shute, Russell Burns, and Ellsworth Smith concerning Unitarian-Universalist Merger, published in this issue of *UNITY*. These are all knowledgeable and active Unitarian leaders. They represent numerous Unitarians in the Middle Atlantic States Council, the Thomas Jefferson Conference, and the Western Unitarian Conference. All of them might not agree

with us that the plan should be totally rejected. However, their statements did much to help us reach that conclusion. They represent a different philosophy of organization from that of the Joint Commission. We would point out that a monolithic organizational structure is antithetical to autonomous, free, and voluntary association. A victory at Syracuse for the present regional practices would only be temporary unless the organizational philosophy and pattern are changed. Once established, a monolithic structure has formidable power for preventing any such change and for eliminating that which does not fit in with it.

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We were informed that the early drafts of the Commission's plan provided for a President who would be the leader in policy making and that the responsibilities of administration would be assigned to an Executive Director appointed by and responsible to the Board of Trustees. This was similar to the recommendation of the Committee on Organization appointed by the Board of the American Unitarian Association. What happened? Did the Commission change its mind when the A.U.A. Board failed to demonstrate the courage of its convictions?

# Centralization Again?

DALE DEWITT

HE decision Unitarians must make concerning a form of organized religious life for the future is whether to change radically the basic practices of long standing and resort to a highly centralized operation, or to continue to sustain the voluntary, free forms of activity.

The issue has two aspects. The first is the validity of voluntary activity organizationally for free religion. The second is the relation of voluntary organizational forms to freedom of individual and group religious belief.

This statement contends that for a free religion voluntary organization for services to churches and fellowships in ways they desire is sound and greatly more effective than centralized organizational control in which societies delegate powers to one organization acting, in essence, as a trustee of their affairs.

The points undergirding the idea of voluntary service organizations, established by those to be served as they wish, on a basis of responsibility to them are as follows:

1. There is a more responsive attitude, a greater sensitivity to needs, and a better means of con-

tinuous relationship in smaller service organizations close at hand than in continental-wide organizations.

2. There are particular kinds of services which can best be rendered by smaller organizations directly responsible to churches and fellowships nearby.

3. Natural geographical transportation factors and ease of association enter into decisions for grouping which churches and fellowships can determine more effectively than a continental agency.

4. More people take an interest and participate in the operations of a "near-by" agency which is their own than if an outpost of a continental organization is established.

5. If there is a sound principle in the local church being free of national control, this would apply also in the case of associations of churches. This is why it was voted in 1936 in a declaratory statement that "neither does the Association have any authority over other conferences or associations of Unitarian churches having lesser geographical scope."

6. Churches and fellowships will get a more sensitive, devoted,

and satisfactory type of service from a regional office if the council and staff are directly responsible to them than if it is responsible to them only indirectly through a continental-wide organization. Staff, feeling a primary responsibility to a continental agency, will be inclined to put its immediate interests ahead of those of the regional constituency.

7. Regions, as now operating, have been to some degree, and can be increasingly, a way for constructive criticism to flow from groups of churches to the national agency. This can provide a substitute for irresponsible criticism. This is a far more important factor than is generally realized. Regional staff would naturally hesitate to be a channel of criticism if directly responsible to the continental administration.

8. There have been nearly twenty years of experience of regional organizations operating with primary responsibility to their own churches and fellowships. An examination of the activities and achievements of regions on their present basis is a testimony to the vitality and to the basic soundness of the plan. It has proved to be a morale-building device to have regions independent of national control. On the other hand, the history of results of centralization is to be found in the Appraisal Commis-

sion reports of 1936, as in the experience of the denomination in the preceding years.

9. Unitarianism, through its present organizational plan, has achieved an effective working compromise between the extremes of centralization and decentralization, neither of which is desirable. Universalism had reached the extreme of decentralization, with state conventions which possessed the bulk of the denomination's money. The Unitarian Association would be the extreme of centralization if, in addition to controlling funds and their appropriation, the regions were established and controlled from the top.

As it is now, there is a sensitive balance in Unitarianism through the responsibility of regions to their constituencies, the appropriation of funds by a neutral, non-administrative body (United Appeal), and an increasingly well-defined consultative relationship with the American Unitarian Association. A division of power is appropriate for a free religion.

The second aspect has to do with the problem of freedom of belief. This stems from the idea that a highly centralized power structure in religion is one of the surest paths to a limitation of freedom of belief. Remote as this may seem at this time in Unitarianism, it can be said with

organizational experience behind it that, given the power structure with which to operate, a majority may gradually find ways to limit the heritage of freedom of belief. This is a danger that should not be overlooked as the consideration of structural change is under way.

It may be asked why, if the continental agency is responsible to all the churches and fellowships and organized by them, this is not sufficient assurance of the application of democracy. There is a natural tendency for large continental organizations to assume power and a separateness from their constituencies. There is a corresponding tendency for large constituencies to grant authority by default to an elected administration. The sense of responsiveness decreases with the psychological and geographical distance from the constituency. This is why there has always been, in greater or less degree, a somewhat suspicious attitude of Unitarians in churches about "what goes in Boston."

The history of centralization is that the power gravitates to fewer

people. The constituency abdicates by default to a board and an elected executive. The board turns more and more responsibilities over to a small executive committee. The executive committee accedes to the executive, and the one-man rule is approached, if not fully achieved.

Democratic processes are maintained by a slender thread always. A movement of freedom in religion needs a variety of agencies, some close to groups of churches and fellowships, directly responsible to them, in order to maintain the assurance of truly democratic checks and interchange.

If the free religious movement, under the pressures of consolidation of two organizations, again becomes highly centralized, then the cycle of the past will be repeated, and ultimately a revolt will occur, as in the thirties, for the establishment of decentralization. Why should Unitarians allow, under the pressure of merger, a centralization which, without merger, would be considered contrary to our policy and probably could not be achieved?



# A Democratic Tradition

J. RAY SHUTE

**C**ONTINENTAL Unitarianism—being a dynamic religious expression—is in a constant state of flux. Adjusting and adapting to contemporary situations is a necessary role of local societies, local and regional conferences and councils, as well as the American Unitarian Association. There is no status quo, at any level, which can or should receive special consideration by Unitarians, either as individuals or as members of voluntary groups. As individuals, or in corporate groups, Unitarians should always remain aware of our susceptibility to change. It is not only desirable, it is mandatory, if we are to remain true to our heritage.

The American Unitarian Association originated, not as an administrative seat of authority but as a voluntary association of Unitarians. It provided a logical means whereby there could be centered an exchange point, a medium of joint debate and action, a depository for Unitarians, scattered here and there. As a means of satisfying felt needs, the American Unitarian Association was called upon to assume more and more responsibilities for Unitarianism as a Denomination. Gradually the role of the American Uni-

tarian Association became that of an association of societies and in recent years this has been defined by law to be exclusively so.

The need for auxiliary groups grew with the growth of Unitarianism. The establishment of voluntary, local conferences was a natural development and took place to fill additional needs of local societies. Their composition, area of geographical function, and role have varied with the needs and demands of their constituencies. Their geographical areas are not, and have never been, static; there are no territorial boundaries of a fixed nature—nor could this ever be. Individual Unitarians, as well as local societies, possessing primary freedom and sovereignty, cannot be forced into conforming and predetermined geographical, associational boundaries. Liberals do not approve such concepts and cannot be expected to conform thereto. It is a fallacy of the first magnitude to assume that there is such a thing as territorial integrity as regards geographical divisions or sub-divisions of the North American continent. In the first place, all conferences are voluntary associations of local societies and not land grants of territory. It is a mistake to look upon

them otherwise, as this would do violence to the idea of congregationalism and to freedom of association. Since Regions in Unitarianism were organized at different times, under different circumstances, and, strangely enough, with different purposes in the hearts and minds of their founders, it is erroneous to generalize too much about what Regions are, their functions, and their future. Regions are, and will be, whatever the member societies thereof choose them to be or become. The very same thing is true of the American Unitarian Association.

The average Unitarian (is there such a person?) would certainly object to a geographical status quo as much as he would to an ideological or philosophical fixity. The current consideration of regionalism as a geographical division of the continent could very well be an outmoded concept of the role of function. It would not require a futurist to conceive of joint associations of local societies within the context of a non-geographical voluntarism. Certainly the problems, opportunities, functions, etc., of churches and fellowships differ to such an extent as to suggest an entirely different approach to joint organization. No one has the right to suggest the manner in which the one or the other should develop. Liberalism does not sug-

gest conformity.

It is not outside the realm of reason to envision a future association of Christian, Humanist, Theist, non-theological, social action—or what have you—groupings of societies. If the felt need arises, we may be sure it will be satisfied. The point we are here raising is the obvious fact of the very tentative and experimental nature of all liberal organization. An intelligent consideration of regionalism must be, it seems, within the term and scope of the actual role and functions of all voluntary organizations of autonomous societies. In the end both the region and the subregion are permanent only so far as the member groups thereof permit them to be. They can be changed overnight at the will of their components.

To assume that regionalism should be no concern of the American Unitarian Association is to forget the role and function of this largest and most significant of all the voluntary Unitarian organizations. The American Unitarian Association is the *only* place where all societies are represented and where there can be an exchange of ideas from every region. If, as a result of such exchange of ideas on regionalism, there appears to be a desired change, then delegates may return to their regions and present these fresh views and, if they are accept-

able, changes will be made. Furthermore, the delegates to the American Unitarian Association may by their votes change the relationship of the American Unitarian Association to regional organizations. Regions can do likewise. When and if there are differences, these can be resolved in democratic and realistic terms, once ground rules are adopted.

It is the fact that legends have grown up around both the American Unitarian Association and the regions—which are not neces-

sarily true—that demands a study of regionalism as it is today and may be tomorrow. What disposition will be made of the results of this study by the voting delegates to the American Unitarian Association and regional conferences is beside the point here. The study of regionalism and the relation of the American Unitarian Association thereto is just as much a duty of the American Unitarian Association as are studies of the American Unitarian Association by member groups thereof. This is in the best democratic tradition.

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## Democratic Regionalism

RUSSELL BURNS

**H**IS is a proposal for democratic regionalism to replace Article V of the Constitution as proposed by the Unitarian-Universalist Joint Merger Commission.

1. It is explicitly recognized by the Unitarian Universalist Association that each Unitarian and Universalist church and fellowship is a completely autonomous body. Also, it shall be explicitly recognized by the Unitarian Universalist Association that the Association has been formed at the desire and will of the autonomous member churches and fellowships to render certain specific duties

and services as determined and assigned to it by the member churches and fellowships. The Unitarian Universalist Association, its Board of Trustees, its Officers and its Staff personnel shall be the agents and servants of the member churches and fellowships, shall be responsible to the member churches in the manner set forth in the bylaws, and shall possess no powers not specifically conferred upon them by the direct action of the member churches and fellowships in delegate body assembled.

2. It is recognized that groups of churches and fellowships will

associate, as they have in the past, for the furtherance of common interests and that these various associations result in subregional and regional organizations sufficient for the discharge of duties according to the local needs. The Unitarian Universalist Association cherishes the values resulting from such initiative and association, realizing that past experience has demonstrated that the flow of the creative process is most vigorous and group loyalties most strong when local groupings make available the opportunity for frequent face-to-face meetings and full communication and discussion of their particular needs and problems. Therefore, nothing in the constitution or bylaws shall be construed as limiting the rights of member churches and fellowships to so associate and to function as autonomous bodies. It is expected that these autonomous local associations will continue to operate within the continental objectives determined by the General Assembly, and that they will continue to support, maintain, and promote the liberal religious movement.

3. In order to provide for services which can best be supplied through regional organization and in order to foster, to the fullest extent, the creative genius of individual initiative, the Unitarian Universalist Association shall

encourage the binding together of member churches and fellowships into area associations which may be effectively and economically served by regional offices, such area associations to be called Regions.

4. Since the services required by the churches and fellowships are of a varied nature, some can best be offered by a continental organization, some jointly by continental and regional organizations, and others are more suitably and effectively provided by regional organizations. In the first category should fall such services as research, publications, program materials, financial aid in church expansion, ministerial admissions, standards and pensions, continental meetings, church school curriculum and research, Church of the Larger Fellowship, public relations, World Churches, etc. Under the second category should come the settlement of ministers, religious education services, leadership training, church extension, communication and information, fund raising, etc. Under the regional category should fall direct field services in the areas of religious education, fellowship promotion and development, advisory financial service, direct and responsible involvement with the regional churches and fellowships in the raising of all denominational operating

funds, consultation on churchmanship problems, involvement of lay leadership, organizing and operating regional conferences and training sessions, organizing and advising specific or special regional committees, promotional stimulation by frequency of contact between regional staff members and the local churches and fellowships, consultation with ministers, advice and consultation with churches and fellowships in times of stress and tension, etc.

5. Autonomous Unitarian Regions and Universalist State Conventions have been in existence for many years, over which the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America have had no authority. In establishing the new regions of the Unitarian Universalist Association, it shall be necessary to determine the boundaries and areas of these new regions by negotiation "in the field" and by mutual agreement between the Unitarian Universalist Association and the existing autonomous Unitarian Regions and Universalist State Convention. Consolidation at the continental level need not wait until all the problems involved in the establishment of the new regions are solved, so long as it is understood and agreed that such regions will be formed by mutual negotiation and assent, acting throughout in the

best interest of the continental, liberal religious movement. The disposition of existing funds, both restricted and unrestricted, now held by Unitarian Regions and Universalist State Conventions shall be determined by negotiation between the Unitarian Universalist Association and each region and state convention. Since the regions and state conventions are autonomous bodies, the Unitarian Universalist Association must obtain their consent to certain allocations and dispositions before it is in a position to proceed with special legislation and court decrees necessary to any transfer of funds.

6. In order to maintain at the highest degree the continued spirit of independent initiative and imaginative creativity that resides at the local level and that in recent years has contributed so extensively to the extension and expansion of the liberal religious movement, it is essential that the new regions be so organized as to give them the maximum freedom possible within the framework of continental objectives to determine their own destiny.

Each member church and fellowship, through a suitable delegate system, shall participate in the election of a regional board of directors to serve as the agent and servant of the Region. Suitable nominating procedures shall

be established by the regional delegate body, assuring experienced personnel through a system of staggered and limited terms, striving toward the widest possible area representation and taking full advantage of committed lay and ministerial leadership. Where and when a subregional conference or "area council" develops, such "area council" shall have a representative on the Regional Board of Directors. The Regional delegate body shall elect a president, a vice-president, and a secretary, who shall be members of the regional board. The Regional Board of Directors, from within or without its membership, shall select a treasurer. The Regional Board of Directors shall select such standing and special committees as the regional bylaws may designate, giving attention to area representation, competency and commitment. Also, it shall employ an Executive Secretary and his assisting staff. The Executive Secretary shall be the full-time, salaried, executive official of the Regional Board of Directors. He shall be directly responsible to the Board and he shall be the administrator of the regional office and staff. Also, he shall serve as the Regional Director of the Unitarian Universalist Association; and in this capacity he shall have the duty of cooperating fully with the Association

in the pursuit and prosecution of its established objectives. Since the Executive Secretary serves in a dual capacity, the Regional Board of Directors shall inform each of its churches and fellowships and the Association in advance of the person or persons it has under consideration for Executive Secretary, thus giving all concerned an opportunity to express themselves upon the candidate or candidates. After consideration of all subject communications received within a stipulated time, the Regional Board of Directors shall decide upon and employ its Executive Secretary, the Unitarian Universalist Association shall utilize his services as "in fact" its Regional Director, working through him with the region, keeping him fully and effectively informed, using him as the locus of communication between the Association and the region, consulting with him on all matters pertaining to and affecting his region and showing him such other consideration as is essentially necessary to his successful performance as Regional Director. Where, from the local or Association standpoint, the Executive Secretary-Regional Director is failing to perform his duties both have recourse to the Regional Board of Directors for remedial action; but, the Regional Board shall have final authority over any such

action.

Here mutual trust is of the utmost importance and is equally required at the local, regional, and continental levels. Realizing that the power of the Unitarian Universalist Association resides unequivocally in the hands of its member churches and fellowships, it behooves all regional and continental boards, officers, staffs and committees to keep their activities strictly within the limits prescribed by the continental delegate body. Never must sight be lost within any portion of the cooperative, continental organization of the fact that autonomy, freedom, and democracy are among its highest values.

7. Since it takes money to operate the continental and regional organizations and for each to render the services assigned to it, such operating revenues shall be raised through some form of "community chest" organization, spearheaded by the continental organization but allowing each region to work toward its assigned quota in such manner as it deems most effective within its confines. Since the hand that controls the purse strings has unwarranted power over the determination of policy and the pursuit of objectives, the fund-raising organization shall not be the disbursing agency. Hence under the assumption that the continental and re-

gional organizations are equally and sincerely committed to the furtherance of the liberal religious movement, a budgeting and disbursing organization shall be established in which the continental and regional organizations shall have a voice. Here it may be well to consider whether or not such associated and parallel organizations as the Laymen's League, the General Alliance, Liberal Religious Youth, etc., should be placed on a self-sustaining basis.

8. For the benefit of the whole continental movement, and in order to establish and continue a unified plan for the coordination, development and extension of services and work which can most effectively be accomplished through regional and subregional organizations, the Unitarian Universalist Association shall from time to time call a consultative conference of the appropriate boards, officers, committees, and staffs of the continental and regional organizations. The recommendations and findings of said conferences shall be binding upon all parties when adopted by their respective delegate bodies. In the event such consultative conferences are not called by the Association within any three year period, a majority of the regional organizations may call such a conference.

# What Does It Mean To Be Moral?

MAX D. GAEBLER

**M**ORALITY has to do with considerations of right and wrong, and to speak of a person as moral means that he lives in accordance with what is right. The moral person is one who does what he ought to do and avoids what he ought not to do.

The starting point for any inquiry into what it means to be moral must be to discover if we can know what it is that we ought to do or ought not to do. For many people this is an absurd question. It is so obvious to them what things are right and what things are wrong that they find it a waste of time to think about it. Some may profess to find the catalogue of these goods and evils in the Bible or in the long-standing traditions of the church; others will make reference to the universal usage of civilized men; still others may even claim the warrant of scientific authority for their list of what is good and what is bad. But all of these alike will have no difficulty telling us what is right and what is wrong.

It may at first seem that some things could easily be put down on one or the other list. Some moral decisions will be very complicated and difficult—some of the

most important issues we face among them; but surely there must be a good many things we could all quickly agree are either right or wrong. So, I say, it would seem.

But in this as in so many things appearances can be very deceiving. Practices regarded as right and proper in one culture are often regarded as serious moral offenses in another. Some societies in southeast Asia even today not only sanction but encourage what we would call trial marriages—extended periods during which a young man and a young woman actually live together before finally solemnizing their relationship. Such a practice has certain obvious advantages in helping to make certain that a given couple is well matched. In a society where it is supported by long and ample precedent and where it receives general social approbation, it would be difficult indeed to condemn a young couple for engaging in this practice. Yet in our own society it would be quite another matter. Not only is there no accepted precedent for such a practice; it is utterly opposed to the dominant attitudes toward marriage and would meet with widespread social disapproval. More-

over, because such attitudes are deeply rooted and have been internalized in all of us perhaps more deeply than we realize, it is doubtful whether any American couple could engage in such a practice without offending their own sense of what is right and proper, their own consciences, and thus arousing pervasive feelings of guilt. Under such circumstances we may well conclude that such a practice is wrong. In other words, precisely the same practice in terms of external events is imbued with radically different meanings in different societies. It is, accordingly, regarded as right in one setting and wrong in another.

Any attempt to make a list of specific actions which are right or wrong is doomed in advance to failure—or at least to so many qualifications that it becomes meaningless. When you get down to cases, it is difficult if not impossible to find even a single action which under any and all circumstances would always be morally the same. Our laws and the courts which enforce them recognize this fact in making allowance for circumstances which might make an otherwise petty offense seem more grievous or an otherwise serious offense seem less so. If, for example, you kill a person in the process of defending yourself against his attack, it is by no

means the same crime as if you planned a cold-blooded murder. It is not just the external observable actions that count; even more, it is the meaning these actions have in the lives of those who perpetrate them and of those upon whom they are perpetrated.

This suggests another thing about morality: and that is that morality is not an individual affair, but a social concern. It is an aspect of the interrelationships between two or more individuals. We often lose sight of this fact, since a moral decision must be made by an individual. But its character as a moral decision arises from its consequences. Its effects upon others may be quite indirect and even remote; yet the nature of those consequences in their fullest determinable dimensions is the basis upon which the moral character of the decision rests.

The above statement would not be acceptable to everyone, or even to most people. For a much more common understanding is that there is a moral law with definite precepts, a law made clear either in tradition or through the use of reason, but in any case knowable in detail. The moral man is the man who does the things which are always and immutably right and avoids those things which are always and immutably wrong. This is an attractive and appeal-

ing view, but it seems to me a false one. For when you get down to cases every situation seems to offer a slightly different moral problem. You simply have to consider the circumstances, and the circumstances that are most important are those involving the consequences of the action under consideration.

Right at this point I want to pause to make one very important observation. Quite often the point which I have just been making is grossly misinterpreted, especially by young people. Confronted with the realization that specific actions do not derive their character as moral or immoral from some absolute and immutable law, but rather from their social and cultural context, many are apt to feel that the props have been knocked out from under all the values by which they have guided their lives. They will suppose that the commonly accepted moral codes, since they do not rest upon a law of the universe, therefore rest on nothing firm and reliable at all. They are apt to conclude that actions commonly considered moral or immoral are not "really" right or wrong, but are rather "mere" social conventions.

The key to their perplexity is in that word "mere." The fact is that the most deeply rooted moral values in our, or in any, culture

rest not upon thin air, but upon the most substantial kind of foundations. The weight of centuries, the countless instances of individual experience that go into the building of a culture,—all this is truly a more formidable sanction than a hundred tablets delivered on Sinai's summit by the hand of God himself.

Such a sanction operates in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, the individual who violates the cherished values of his society runs the risk of social disapproval and, if his offense is serious enough, of isolation, a condition none of us can bear for long. But even more effective than this, the sanction of the gathered weight of cultural experience works inside each of us as individuals. None of us grows up in a vacuum. In a thousand ways we absorb the values of those about us from our earliest infancy, with the result that the values of our culture are far more deeply and subtly woven into the very fabric of our being than we ever consciously suspect. The values of the culture become our own; they are internalized in each individual and produce that phenomenon known as conscience. The person who violates the cherished values of his culture therefore risks much more than the disapproval of society; he risks the disapproval of his own conscience. The fruit of such disapproval can

be the kind of pervasive feelings of guilt which can best be described as alienation even from oneself. Therefore one departs from these "mere" social conventions at one's dire peril, and only for the most compelling reasons.

Please note this last statement carefully. For I am certainly not suggesting that it is wise always to conform, always to do what has been done in the past, always to accept the inherited values uncritically. Rather, I am suggesting that such values should be rejected only for the most compelling reasons. And such reasons do from time to time occur. The fact that they can at times exist points to sources of morality which transcend cultural norms, sources which have a more compelling claim upon us than the generally accepted values of our society.

What these are, and how compelling we feel them to be, will vary from one individual to another. Yet it is a fact of history that in every living culture there have come prophetic moments when some gifted individual saw beyond the immediate issue to a more inclusive context of ethical judgment and managed to communicate his vision with power and persuasiveness; or moments when cataclysmic events forced everyone to look up from the rubble of his shattered world and consider everything from the ground

up.

Those whose voices have stirred fresh imaginings and touched the very springs of human feeling, the great prophets whose words reach beyond their own time and place to move us still—these have spoken less of specific deeds which are either enjoined or prohibited than they have of great moral directives. "Let justice roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." These words of Amos are typical of the great prophetic utterances. They leave it for us to determine in the context of our own situation what it is specifically that is righteous or just, what is evil or good. For the problem of applying these general ethical guidelines to the specific conditions of life is always new, always complicated, always uncertain. So complicated and so uncertain are the specific applications of these great ethical generalizations that it is well to beware of anyone who claims a simple or a total answer. Anyone who is sure he knows what righteousness requires, who knows exactly what is the course of justice, and who assures us that all we need is the courage to do what he and we too should know is right, has forgotten the most important element of all: namely, humility.

There is still one more thing to say about morality. That is to

point to the danger of passing judgment. It is less important to judge the actions of others or of ourselves than it is to understand them. Certainly in this psychological age we should understand the complexity of human motivation, including our own. We seldom act from simple and clear motives. A "wrong" act, one with unfortunate consequences, may stem from any of several causes: it may be the result simply of honest error, or of poor judgment; or it may result from some kind of emotional compulsion. It may arise from such causes quite as easily as from some moral weakness.

For this reason again humility looms as the indispensable ingredient of the truly moral life. Perhaps the wisest words of all are those of the prophet Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" The very fact that it is so difficult to interpret just what we must do in order to "do justly" and to "love mercy" makes humility imperative. The best thing we can say, therefore, is that to be moral is not only to be just and merciful, but above all to be humble before the greatness and the infinite variety of life.



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# The Role of Function

J. RAY SHUTE

**T**HE liberal is under the recurring obligation to periodically reevaluate his position, reexamine his values, restudy his goals. He, likewise, must reconsider his methods of organizing and conducting his life. Since his basic assumptions are neither absolute nor total, his position demands a constant reorientation in terms of the continuing change through which nature and its greatest manifestation — man — operate. Therefore, the liberal proceeds from two observable and demonstrable points of view: naturalistic and relativistic. Whatever else man may be, he is certainly the product of the evolutionary process within nature. Whatever his values and goals, they are relative and not absolute. Hence, regardless of his terminology, symbolism, and semantics, the liberal must develop his cosmological frame of reference in terms of his naturalistic environment and his orientation in terms of a relativistic value system.

If the foregoing generalities are valid, then, the liberal is under no obligation whatever to reinterpret those generally-accepted methodologies, values, and goals which are violative of the liberal's basic assumptions. As a fact, except for

his societal relations it would seem out of character for a liberal to experience a compulsion to adapt and adjust to an antithetical rationale. The function of the liberal is certainly not that of interpretation of the supernatural and the absolute, so that a liberal terminology can be applied to assumptions which the liberal cannot otherwise accept. Nor, for that matter, would the orthodox be able to interpret liberalism in his own terminology as a means of finding areas of agreement. Since the basic assumptions are antithetical, a synthesis does not assume tenability except within the shadows of symbolism. In the democratic society it is assumed that there can be variety without conflict and stability without conformity. Hence, there is no reason to fall into the error of interpretation of conflicting assumptions. We learn to live with variety and conflict, even as we must learn to live, without fear or panic, with both uncertainty and insecurity.

If liberty is a birthright of the democratic society and freedom is a status to be achieved on one's own initiative and within a relative frame of reference, the burden upon the liberal is the constant struggle to maintain man's birthright and to keep the institutions

within the democratic society liberal and constantly endeavoring to achieve freedom. Thus, the liberal position could never become static, save by the denying of birthright and heritage. It is due to this fact that liberals would never all belong to one political party, or economic class, or anything else. While it is often frustrating to liberals, there could never be a liberal status, definable, static, unchangeable, and central to all liberals. There can only be commitment to principles, basic assumptions, and methods. Unity in diversity is far more than a liberal cliché, it is a fact of life to the liberal. Institutional liberalism, if practical at all, is only so within this concept of the legitimacy of variety. Whenever one liberal tries to impose his opinions upon another, or attempts to restrict opinions contrary to his own, he is guilty of denying his birthright and heritage; furthermore, he is violating the basic assumptions of liberalism and democracy. In the vernacular, he is trying to eat his cake and have it too. This is impossible.

Whether or not Unitarianism is a part of the liberal tradition is a highly debatable matter. Certainly it is a non-conforming, unorthodox system of religion, but institutional religion, per se, is difficult to associate with the concept of liberalism. That Unitar-

ianism is heretical, every Christian would agree; that many Unitarians are liberals is a fact needing no discussion; but it is very questionable if we could, in all honesty, call Unitarianism a liberal organization. Granted that there are thousands of Unitarians who are not liberal, some who are conservative, and a few who are reactionary, the institution of Unitarianism does not function as a liberal body, locally or nationally. Maybe it is in the process of becoming liberal, who knows? It could just as well be in the process of becoming conservative.

Liberalism is not a matter of definition, it is a matter of the role of function, i.e., an individual or a group is, in fact, whatever he or it functions as. Value judgments have validity only within the term and scope of the role of function. Neither the theist nor humanist can prove his case by definition; neither can the Christian nor the liberal. It is not a matter of definition, it is a matter of function. This is where the idea of "deed, not creed" comes into the picture, writ large.

It is possible for churches to be liberal, although it is quite difficult. Whenever there is a vested interest, this tends toward conservatism. The problem of the church budget is of far more significance than its mere financial implications. In order to raise

the budget, too often compromise is involved, not only by the minister in his sermons, and otherwise, but by the activities of the church. Unfortunately, most affluent people are not noteworthy for their liberalism. The organization man shies away from controversy as he does from any radical position. The American middle class today is conservative and is also the "member group" in most Unitarian churches. Need more be said on this subject? Mergers have historically produced more conservatism than liberalism. The latter is usually produced through "split-off," seldom, if ever, through merger. Unitarianism in the future would, therefore, appear to be headed in a more conservative direction.

In America, social gains and individual liberty and justice have nearly always come from the crusades of political liberals—seldom from religious liberals. Most of the current liberalism to be found in churches throughout America resulted from the gains of the New Deal and not from any particular efforts of a denominational nature. Perhaps the greatest group effort, of a non-political nature, came from organized labor, whose social gains have been noteworthy. It is a genuine calamity that organized labor has fallen prey to the philosophy of bigness (which is the nation's greatest curse) and

now enters into collusion with management, in lieu of fighting for labor, so the spiral of inflation continues upward.

If we overlook momentarily the power structure and its function and confine our consideration of churches to their historic and religious function, all churches have as their primary role the saving of souls. Since liberal religion is naturalistic, this creates a religious anomaly. Unitarianism is the only religion not competing in this competition. It is no wonder that non-Unitarians cannot understand just what it is that a church could do that would otherwise be significant. Denying both heaven and hell, Unitarianism has neither threat nor promise to offer the profane as reward or punishment. It is easy for them to understand the microscopic membership in Unitarianism; we do not utilize proven techniques for securing members. To them—and they may be correct—Unitarianism is really not a religion after all. To them, Unitarianism is a trinity of general semantics, debating society, and tranquilizers ("under the spreading atrophy," as Perlman would put it!).

Since science has given us vitamin tablets and tranquilizers to make the Atomic Age livable, it is somewhat difficult to now determine the role and function of the church for the naturalist. In the

past the weak and weary found rest in the church. The frightened and the insecure turned to the church for peace and security. It offered a haven where the wicked ceased from troubling and the weary found rest. Now, all of this can be got by simply swallowing a pill. Radio, T.V., and Hi-Fi furnish music and entertainment with which the church cannot hope to compete. The pulpit and church newsletter no longer compete with the mass media of propaganda for the loyalties of men. Salvation is now a political technique, and peace, like security, is now an obsolete term, practically without meaning. Liberalism and democracy have meaning only within the new terminology, which is to say "the old gray mare ain't what she used to be." No one currently debates who and what are liberal and democratic. The new criterion is: what are our survival potentialities? Neitzche has been enthroned as lord of the manor and for the first time—though in a somewhat different context—American leaders accept the statement of Jesus that he who would save his life must first lose it.

Contemporary Unitarianism must, if it is to assume relevancy in our time, discontinue its neutralism and passiveness and develop a dynamic leadership in terms of social action and the

ethic which attaches thereto. To debate the historical abstractions of theology or dwell upon the meaningless clichés of yesteryear is to be unrealistic to the point of naiveté. Ours is an age of bold determination, when the fate of mankind literally hangs in the balance. Nothing really matters if mankind is destroyed in a holocaust of atomic war. Being humans, we must make our current evaluations within the human situation. It would therefore appear that the social ethic, not religiosity, would be central to the position of Unitarianism. The social gospel of Jesus, alone, will not suffice; ours must be a contemporary social gospel, formulated and expressed in terms of man, where and as he is, and what he may become within the historical realities of the human situation. This involves a fresh look at man and nature; it also concerns itself with a new concept of naturalistic relativism. Observation and concern are not enough. Granted we clearly see and are sufficiently concerned, we must then implement our social ethic with social action. It is precisely at this point that we may determine the validity of the liberalism of both the individual and his institutions. We repeat, liberalism is not a matter of definition, but a product of the role of function.

# BOOKMAN'S NOTEBOOK

CHARLES W. PHILLIPS

## TIME, SPACE, AND ETERNITY

At least four books this time deal with these deep-toned subjects of the title, although I want to make room for comment on several others. To get at the main theme first, however,—the theme was set up by starting to read Mircea Eliade, successor to the late Joachim Wach, as professor of Comparative Religion at the University of Chicago. I began with *Cosmos and History*, subtitled "The Myth of the Eternal Return," in paperback (Harper's Torchbooks, \$1.35). This is what you will want to buy first. If your appetite is whetted (mine was) you will want to jump into the same author's *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Sheed and Ward, \$6.50). His *The Sacred and the Profane* (Random House) is a hardback and, like the paperback mentioned, is a shorter book on one part of a theme more fully developed in the "Patterns." The latter is the *magnum opus* of those listed and is really the one to have for serious reference through the years.

Eternity, in the popular view, is usually conceived of as an indefinite or, rather, infinite extension of duration. To live eternally means to live forever. There are enough crudities associated with this, that contemporary theologians often make the concept of eternity little, if anything, more than a qualitative "depth" dimen-

sion of any given moment. They diagram it with a vertical instead of a horizontal line. It has never been clear to me that what I would call this "mystic sense of time" could be severed altogether from ideas of continuing duration. The man in the street may be crude, but not altogether stupid. Also it does not seem possible that any conceivable type of unit for measuring duration, whether of micro-second or light year, can be done except in terms of some "space." "Space-time" then should always be a hyphenated word. There is, therefore, something physical about it, or, if that is not such a good word, it always has a tangible content, and is only known by some "history." History is an event and/or events living and showing change in space.

All of which is by way of trying to get at the subtle and provocative and vastly stimulating approach of Eliade to problems of the sacred and the profane; at the essence of the religious myth or act; and to raise some questions.

The essence of the religious, to our author, if I understand him correctly, is to mark off some different space or time. The primitive, e.g., was trying to escape historical time or perhaps, more accurately, renew it. His myths and rituals reenact events which took place in some *illud tempus*.

some pre-time, and thus they restore things as they were and live in the center of being. Certain "spaces" become sacred as places of breakthrough to the realm of the gods, or spaces wherein the work of the gods can be reenacted —be it in organizing the world, making it fruitful, to secure it, or something.

Eliade has a wealth of evidence and high plausibility in developing this, and ranges through every continent and people, ancient and contemporary. A most important point is that the so-called "primitive" that we know already has a high perception of "ontology." His fertility rites and seasonal celebrations are *not* just fantastic extensions of natural events. They define sophisticated intuitions which came first and just use natural events. This is quite a reversal of what most of us were brought up on in this area, but Eliade merits serious study here.

Eliade finds no great distance between "primitive" and "modern" and generally finds distinctions of "higher" and "lower" between them invidious. He is explicitly not an "evolutionist" in the history of religions. Still he knows that the myths telling about, and the acts repeating, primordial events have themselves a "history," a development in the more profane sense. Even though modern and civilized people are at considerably less distance from the primitive than they think (and it may be tonic for them to so realize), and though development or "history" does not necessarily mean progress to something higher, there is a problem of

truth to be faced, both in history and in any ontological basis it may have. Or to approach the matter in another way, just as one may see the same essence of life, *qua* life, in a protozoan as in a vertebrate, this is not to obliterate the development in between and questions of value in it. The historical gap, or rather duration, between ancient man and modern is so much less than the time span for development from amoeba to man, that one ought to expect to see fewer differences in "religion" and should expect a more confusing situation. Still one cannot ignore the significance of the "history" of myth and ritual and particularly so in this present epoch when rituals to many are *rites*, not *rites*, and to many others neither evoke nor reenact anything meaningful.

Still moderns are not opaque to the "terror of history," which presumably gives basic rise to the religious development. The experience of the tragic comes to all perceptive persons even if their physical circumstances are favorable. If nothing else, they finally die. For millions upon millions in this world, the "terror of history" is a smashing evil. So it has mostly been and looks like it will mostly be for the foreseeable future. It is highly understandable that there be a strong desire to renew history periodically, as perhaps most religion in the world does and which may be misnamed "primitive"; to live proleptically in terms of a trans-historical kingdom to come, as with Christianity; or to get off

the wheel altogether in some kind of a Nirvana or de-personalized life in Brahma, as in strong Eastern trends.

The Unitarian or religious liberal has not fitted well into any of these. Firmly committed to religion within the boundaries of experience, as our author is, the liberal is also welded, or so it seems to me, to a higher valuation of history, at least to the *necessity* of history. How could this ontological realm or ground be known except by its product? What would it *be*, without history? A shorthand way of saying it, I suppose, is that God to be God has to have Man. This is no matter of a ruler needing subjects. Rather God would not *be*, without Man. And, so, I think it could be developed,—history, or life in history, must have some redemption preserving the essentiality of that *historical being*, regardless of any and all possible circumstances. Of some such gigantic nature is the kind of affirmation we are committed to and have to claim upon the basis of experience.

Yet, admittedly, we have much work to do to give this any articulation that is going to compete with the three major responses to history given above. We are still like those elementary invertebrates who regenerate sexually one generation, and asexually the next. We *are* extremely close, not only to the primitive but to the limited religious history of the West, of which we are a part. Strong and astringent against cheap heavens of "pie in the sky, bye and bye," we have groped

mostly with "Thy kingdom come on earth. . . ." As a social gospel it has been productive of enough good upon remediable evil that it is not to be counted out. But as a sole stick it has missed the eschatological dimension of meaning of the phrase in the mind of its first author and substitutes its own completely earth-bound eschatology in some future, which in the very nature of the case, if and whenever it comes, most living people could not share.

I think I could suggest lines for our investigation, but this is not the place, except to refer to one massive, life-long attempt, by a modern, liberal man, Thomas Mann. The most complete effort to present it is in a book by Beacon: *The World As Will and Representation*, by Fritz Kaufmann, \$6.00.

Before a brief word on that, however, let me say that Eliade's work is in many ways a real and long-awaited return to the "psychology of religion." I have not really done enough here with many facets which would stimulate reflection for a long time.

The "terror of history" has been in many respects the chief occupation of Thomas Mann. A terror primarily to the artist at first, but as Mann became a political mind, his artistic and moral sensitivity included all mankind. Mann has been attuned to so many things, and, fundamentally so, to the point of genius. The Stoic-Christian sense is there. He is likewise a child of the Enlightenment; of Romanticism in both its dark and light sides. All this and more. What makes him at-

tractive in part is that he tries to overcome the antagonisms of history, without abrogating or denying it. He is essentially reverent to any tradition of significance. This is sound, for there is no living tradition without insight. The great themes of repetition, renewal, simultaneity, etc., are not demeaned. They are psychologically appreciated, even though they are taken into a development of the individual in such a way that the repetition is a growth, without becoming a contradiction. Although devoted to the raft of reason, Mann knows that it floats on the sea of myth. So he in fact celebrates mythical representation, but as "a way of overcoming the exclusiveness of space and time points, of things and events, *without sacrificing* (italics mine) altogether an articulate understanding of this world, and identifying everything with everything else." Again in saying that life must be lived under one of the great human prototypes, he finds according to Kaufmann, that "a man may qualify his imitation of a personal model, may change his orientation and enjoy even a limited freedom of moving into a different constellation." Aware of a domain of the divine, and tremendously rich in appreciations, Mann is in the great humanist tradition, for he sees that man "is not merely the stage on which spirit and nature vie for supremacy; *he is himself the protagonist who decides the struggle.*" [Italics added.]

This book by Kaufmann is a heavy one, and again there is only the slightest allusion to it here,

as in the case of Eliade. It would take a solid paper or essay to work on these things, and little if any journalism stands still for that any more. I only introduce them because they deal with pertinent, not to say vital, matters and at a very superior level of depth. In the case of the Kaufmann book you will have to be, or become, fairly familiar with the main novels of Mann, at least with *Buddenbrooks*, *Magic Mountain*, and the *Joseph* series.

There was a descent of pacifists upon Omaha this summer, to operate a project known as Omaha Action. It involved acts of non-violent resistance and civil disobedience at missile sites, under construction nearby. A number got themselves arrested and were given jail sentences. They were given a parole on first apprehension and then sentencing upon breaking parole. Each wrote a statement for public release as to why he or she was doing this. These I have read and have talked personally to several of the individuals. None convinced me that this was a way either to peace or to stimulate thought out of lethargy. There is a book out, however, which is, I think, the best rationale for such action I have ever read. It is Victor Gollancz' *The Devil's Repertoire* (Doubleday). Gollancz is an English publisher, a convinced pacifist, and he tells why. Gollancz is powerful because he is absolutely candid for one thing. He uses words like "absolute" and "anarchist" to describe himself or his program. Many in this field

of belief show every manifestation of these things, but won't admit it, and have a somewhat easy use of "God." Whoever takes God for his authority is not easily beaten out of his argument, but is not likewise necessarily convincing. He may achieve nothing more than "the odour of sanctity." Gollancz rings a few changes on "God" and "Christianity" but his argument is based upon a definition of the spiritual and a primary experience of it. It is also an uncommonly good, clear, convincing description in two pages, 41 and 42, of the *notes* of a spiritual experience. I would heartily commend the book for this and for a lot of well-put distinctions between the "spiritual" and the "natural" without making the former "supernatural" along with the unhappy overtones which go with it. For myself, I find certain nonsequiturs between this excellent theoretical base and his deductions of pacifism and unilateral disarmament, and do not agree with his conclusions, but I am glad to have found a manner, form, and spirit of argument which tries to *convince* me, instead of *convert* me, or give me a lead-pipe of "love" —with really heartfelt concern (?) of course. There should be more pacifists like Gollancz who admit they can get mad.

A delightful and provocative book in many ways is Jacques Barzun's *House of Intellect* (Harpers, \$5.00). While I won't say anything about them here, you will enjoy his *Teacher in America, Berlioz and His Century* (if you like music and are inter-

ested in nineteenth century cultural history), and *Darwin, Marx, and Wagner*. In fact, if you are waiting until this fall for your sermon opus on the Darwin Centennial, I would recommend the latter book as an astringent piece.

To the matter at hand, however, *House of Intellect*—there has been a spate of books dealing with conformity, educational deterioration, declining intellectual values, etc., and etc. Many are pointed and some clever. All have struck a response but none quite hit the bell, or rather seemed to have some lack. Some have been susceptible to clever twisting to satirize the "conformity of non-conformity." Some have been defeatist, e.g., Richard Chase, and to a degree William Whyte, Jr. Barzun is not defeatist and is too shrewd in wit to be satirized. In short he has done a good, analytical, critical book and therefore is *constructive*. Not that there are any plans here for revising the school system (his chapter on education is excellent), nor how to reverse trends in policy of Foundations. This is no book on either program or method. Still it is constructive because of its clarity and a *faith* in the intellectual tradition that it will recover from panels, cocktail parties, celebration of undifferentiated feeling-states, bastardization of the language, and much more which plague it, all of which he scores with caustic brilliance. The tradition will recover because it is a *necessary* tradition, and we are pragmatists enough to figure that out once again. Sharpness and clarity of analysis like his will

help speed things up.

"Intellect" is not "intelligence" which one can be high in, in an anti-intellectual way. It is also distinguished from "intellectualism" and "pedantry." "Intellect" is really an intellectual tradition, a tradition of concrete, ordered, critical thought refusing to be stamped into ideology on one hand, nor permitting relapse into generalized "feelings" on the other.

Of course Intellect has its limits,

and no one is clearer than the author on them. But so do Art, Science, and Philanthropy (each legitimate too) which are overstepping the boundaries of their limits today and, in doing so at the expense of Intellect, are its chief enemies at the present time.

This book is a tonic to sustain one through another year of committees, group conferences and panels wherein precision of language and meaning will be all but obliterated.

## Western Unitarian Conference

700 Oakwood Boulevard, Chicago 53, Illinois

ELLSWORTH M. SMITH, *Executive Secretary*

### Merger with a Reverse Curve

I suppose that practically every religious denomination in America was first organized as a national office. As each developed churches in every part of the country, regional, state, and even county associations were formed. In each case at some period of time, a great deal of, if not all, authority and initiative was transferred from the central national office to the more localized organizations—that is, of all the democratically-operating denominations. "Unitarians Face a New Age," the published report of our Appraisal Commission of the '30s, makes note of this and comments that the transfer took place in most cases "without loss of faith or face" at any level. Our Commission then recommended radical decentralization in the Unitarian movement.

On August 7th I authorized the

following communication to the churches and fellowships of the Western Conference:

Dear Colleagues:

For a long time there has been a conflict of opinion in our denomination concerning the relationship of the regional organizations to our national body. This conflict is going through a heightened but perhaps definitive phase just now with the proposals of the Merger Commission.

Some six months ago a friend of mine in Boston assured me he knew that the Merger Commission would come up with a proposal for a top-down line organization, and that I wouldn't like it. Before the May Meetings this spring a number of Regional Directors were invited and did meet with the Merger Commission concerning proposals for regional organization that it should incor-

porate in the final definitive proposal it would submit to our two denominations. We urged very strongly that the regions and the Universalist State Conventions be encouraged to negotiate "on the field" concerning their coming together in future merged regions. We certainly pointed out that these sub-national organizations are all independent corporations and cannot be determined by a national vote of either the American Unitarian Association or the Universalist Church of America.

Later, the joint Comity Committee of the Western Conference and the Midwest Universalist Conference sent a communication to the Joint Commission on Merger urging it to restrict its proposals concerning regions to a by-law similar to the one recently adopted at our May Meetings—and that any more detailed attempt to determine the regions might well result in confusing the issue of national merger with matters of regionalism that can only be decided by the regions themselves.

On July 27th the Merger Commission's definitive proposal was previewed at 25 Beacon Street. Invited to be present, I could not, on account of my commitment to our Rocky Mountain Summer Assembly at Estes Park. I have had two direct communications concerning the proposals, one by letter and the other by conversation with someone who was present. I am convinced I have a clear picture of the proposal. It states the autonomy of the regions but also provides for their *establishment, maintenance and "presumably staffing" by the new denom-*

*inational national headquarters.* One of my informants called it "a bit of legalistic legerdemain." I believe all of you who are leaders in the Western Conference need to have this information.

This pattern of regionalism is *not* likely to appear in the final printed proposal mailed to the societies for study and for action at Syracuse. The reason for this is that there was much protest against it from Regional Directors and one or two others present at 25 Beacon Street on July 27th. Dale DeWitt is attempting to write a more acceptable bylaw provision. One person present pointed out to the Merger Commission people that they could not have written a proposal concerning the regions that would lose more votes for merger than the one they had written.

On September 19th the Board of the AUA will meet in special session in Chicago to study the final merger proposal and to consider the report of their own committee on the problem of the regions. This committee has conducted a correspondence with regional offices but has not at any time conferred with either the Secretaries of the regions or with the regional Boards of Directors. In writing about this upcoming September 19th meeting Dr. Greeley states: "One of the problems that we must resolve in connection with merger is how to define our regions . . ." and "I believe we shall want to define the relationship of the regions. . . ." There is no indication that the regions are to have any opportunity to speak for themselves or to be consulted. I received a letter

from Dr. Greeley indicating that the Regional Directors are not expected to be present at this meeting of the Board of the AUA even though we are its Regional Directors.

I honestly believe, and I confess this sadly, that all the official national pressures at the present time are being exerted in the direction of developing a line organization with authority voted at May Meetings and then exerted staff-wise throughout the year from the top down in such a way as to make the regional organizations little more than the field offices of the AUA.

This is contrary to our tradition; it would reverse completely the recommendations of the Commission on Appraisal of the 1930s, which, acted on, produced a full-fledged regional program and more than coincidentally marked the beginning of our modern day growth. It is a move and a long one toward making our national organization a constantly governing body instead of a service agency.

My only further comment is that we should keep in close touch with our churches and fellowships during the period of study of the final proposal of the Merger Commission to make sure that their representatives go to Syracuse with a clear understanding of what they have decided locally they want to have for the foreseeable future in the way of denominational and regional organization. There will be less than six weeks for this study!

I will appreciate your comments. Please send them to me with my assurance of prompt re-

plies to you. I know how I would speak for myself, but I want truly to represent you, and therefore need your advice.

Sincerely,

Ellsworth M. Smith, Secretary

I am certain that a bylaw concerning regionalism in our movement written by Dale DeWitt will embody the best insights of our last twenty years of healthy growth and maturity. My feeling is that the greatest effective power and creativity in our kind of a religious movement comes from the voluntary association of autonomous bodies. However confident and even fond I might be of our national office, I would rather, in the spirit of good Unitarianism, take my cue as to what we should do from the local churches and fellowships and their members than from our national office.

The merger of the AUA and the UCA is one thing—and I am for it. But to change the nature of our organized life so that we would be more governed than we now are by the agencies we create is another thing indeed. It is not inherent in merger and should not be a part of it.

At Western Conference Board meetings held during the Lake Geneva Summer Assembly, the following were among the actions taken:

1. Authorization for our participation in setting up a joint committee to prepare a plan for the merger of the Western Unitarian Conference and the Midwest Universalist Conference. (The Universalist Con-